

Community!

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[0 : 0 0] We are finishing up a series this morning that we've been calling the vision and values series where we've been looking at our DNA, who we are, and let me read our vision one more time.

Our vision is to be a healthy city center church in and for Edinburgh committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship, discipleship, community, and mission.

And so today this final sermon we look at the topic of mission. Now the tricky thing about looking at mission, talking about mission in one sermon is because everything is mission.

Worship is mission. You know, we've all been sent by God and created by God into this world to worship the living God. And that means we're on a mission to worship. And discipleship is mission.

All of us have been called by God and commanded to follow Jesus all the way to the point of great cost. And so discipleship is mission. And community is mission. We've been called to love one another, ask Christ to love the church.

[1 : 0 5] And so community is also mission. Anytime God says get up and go and do something, that's mission. And so all of the things that we've talked about so far in this series are mission.

And today we want to think a little bit more, we want to focus a little more on the outward facing dimension of our mission, which is the mission to go into the city we've been put in to make disciples, to bring people that are not God's people and show them what it means to be God's people by letting them hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word of the gospel that comes through Jesus Christ.

We've got to talk about this because mission is not well received. This aspect of mission particularly is not well received in the 21st century at all.

Late modern people, 21st century people prefer that religion be a private matter. And really that's what secularism means.

Secularism is not so much atheism. Secularism is the separation of religion from the public sphere. It's when religion is totally privatized.

[2 : 2 0] And so in our secular age, the age we live in, people don't like mission because they think it's fine if you're religious but don't make me into your mission.

Don't bring what's private and personal into a public sphere and make me into your mission. Now there are right ways and very wrong ways of being about mission.

And that's a big discussion. But what we have to hear today, in some sense no matter what society thinks is the Acts 1 verse 8 command where Jesus comes and says, you are my witness until the gospel goes to the remotest parts of the earth, until Jesus comes back is what Jesus says here in Acts 1.

And so we've got to see that that's the call, the mission. Jesus says you are a witness. And so let's think about that. Three things, three lessons I think here from the text.

First the fact of mission. Secondly, the nature of mission. And then finally we'll ask about the how of mission. So first the fact of mission. In verse 2 it says that Jesus had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles that he had chosen.

[3 : 36] And so what we see here in this passage that there is one very clear command, you are to go and be my witnesses. But it says that he gives that command to the chosen apostles.

And that's very important. What is a chosen apostle? An apostle, capital A apostle, the qualification, what does it take to become one? You have to have been there and seen Jesus Christ resurrected flesh in person.

And he had to have called you and made you into one of the 12. And that's who's being talked about right here. But when we read a passage like this and he says, you are to be my witnesses, it's tempting to say well who?

And we see very clearly that it's the chosen apostles are being called here. Obviously, he's commanding them. You are to you chosen apostles. Having seen Jesus Christ in the flesh resurrected, you're to be my witnesses.

And just the fact of mission is simply this. You got to say at the very beginning that this command cannot be just about the 12, just about the chosen apostles.

[4 : 45] And one of the ways that we know that is because when you look at the outline of the book of Acts and we mentioned this, I mentioned this in week one, the thesis statement in verse 8 is you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

And when you look at the outline of the book of Acts, the outline actually matches exactly the thesis statement. Jesus command in chapter one verse 8 because in chapters one to five, we read the witness of the apostles in Jerusalem.

And then in chapter six to eight, it's all about the witness of the apostles in Judea and Samaria. And then in chapter nine, all the way to the end of the book, it goes out from there, from Judea and Samaria to the very ends of the earth.

And one of the things that is important to notice is that when it gets to the ends of the earth, chapter nine to 28, what we see is that it's no longer just the apostles doing the witness.

And it's important to say this, that the word apostle in Greek simply means messenger or ambassador or one who has been sent. And so sometimes the New Testament uses a capital A concept of apostle, the 12, the chosen plus Paul.

[6 : 03] And sometimes it uses a lower case A concept of apostle. And who is included in the lower case A concept of apostle? Every single person who believes in Jesus Christ, you're an apostle, not an upper case A, but a lower case A apostle.

You've been called, you've been sent, you're an ambassador. And we see by not only the book of Acts, but by tradition that the gospel by both capital A and lower case A apostles goes to Antioch, North Africa, to the Greek Isles, to present day Turkey, to Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, to Italy.

And that's just the book of Acts. But then we've got extra biblical sources from the second century and the end of the first century that tell us by tradition that the apostles, both upper case and lower case A, went to present day Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and as far as west as France, within just a century after the gospel.

Now that's a lot of territory, but at the same time it's small because it's not the ends of the earth. And the word end here in verse eight is the word eskatos in Greek.

It actually means the remotest, the farthest. The farthest place you could possibly imagine, that's where the gospel has to go before Jesus Christ returns.

- [7 : 22] And so the important thing here, just to hear is point one is the primacy of mission in the Christian life. What we're seeing here is that our identity, if your identity this morning, we know at least that there are nine here who have professed faith publicly this morning.
- Their identity, your identity, if you profess faith in Jesus Christ this morning, is that Jesus turns to you and says, you are a witness to the gospel until it extends to every single corner of the earth.
- You're an ambassador. You're commanded. You're called. You're a missionary. No matter if you stay home or if you go wherever God's put you, there's a primacy in the Christian life to mission.
- We might say like this mission is actually the essence of what we are as Christians. That's the first thing. The second thing then is this, the nature of mission.
- We know the primacy of mission. We are sent by Jesus to be missionaries, ambassadors, witnesses. But the question that this text I think really wants us to ask is from verse eight, Jesus says you are my witnesses.
- [8 : 31] We've got to ask the question, well, what is a witness? And let me give you a too long definition of a witness and then I'll break it down and we'll think about it together for just a minute.
- So here it is, four things. A witness is a person who bears the testimony of Christ as an instrument of the Holy Spirit to the point of great cost for the sake of the kingdom of God.
- I want to work backwards through those four. So first, Jesus tells us here that a witness is a person who lives for a greater reality and that is for the kingdom of God.
- You see, if you look down at verse three, it says in verse three, he presented himself alive, resurrected to them after his suffering by many proofs and for 40 days he appeared.
- And then it says, for those 40 days, what did he do? He spoke about the kingdom of God to them. And then if you look all the way down at the end of the passage at verse 11, the angels come and they say that Jesus Christ who has ascended into heaven will come back to you just like this in the same way he will descend when the kingdom of God comes, we're told in the next verse.
- [9 : 51] And so Jesus taught them all about the kingdom of God and then we learned that actually if you're a Christian today as a witness, you live in a very specific time period, a very specific age of history.
- And that age is the age between the ascension of Jesus Christ and the de-sension of Jesus Christ, the coming again of Jesus Christ. And in between that, in that age, the church age as we often call it, every single Christian has been called to be a witness from the ascension to the return of Christ.
- And where to be a witness to a greater reality, Jesus says, for 40 days he said, you're to be about a reality that's greater than yourself, you're to be about the reality that is the kingdom of God.
- Now, we've got a task in this age that we live in until Jesus Christ returns. And it's to be about the greater reality, the kingdom of God more than our personal realities.
- And if you think, if you were just to just take a few minutes and think about all the gospel preaching churches in Edinburgh and all that they do, all that they get up to on a weekly basis, it would be an absolutely enormous list.
- [11 : 09] Take St. Columbus just by itself. We have Sunday worship twice, every single Sunday. We show, a lot of you will show hospitality to one another this afternoon.
- We've got prayer meetings, teaching series, Bible studies, city groups, international mission support, sparkle sisters, caravan. Many of you are involved in peripheral ministries, individually, food banks, poor relief.

We've got committees, officers, budgets, crash, kids' church, a training program. We have an accountant. And we do tax audits. And the list could be doubled and tripled and quadrupled.

And people don't even realize how much the church is involved in and has to do all the time. And if you looked across all the churches that are preaching the gospel in this city and made that list, it would be absolutely enormous.

And listen, Jesus Christ says all of that is got to be for the kingdom of God. We do a tax audit for the kingdom of God.

[12 : 12] Everything supports the mission. Everything here is about supporting the mission of taking a greater reality to people who are looking for hope.

And that greater reality is the hope of the coming of the kingdom of God. And this is what Jesus says it is, a quick definition of the kingdom. If you're looking for something that seems so hard to define in a quick phrase, the kingdom of God is this.

Jesus is coming back to bring God's people into God's land under God's rule. And that's the kingdom of God.

When Jesus brings God's people into God's land under God's rule. Without sin, without death, without disease, without disaster, that's the coming of the kingdom of God.

And I'll just, we've got to move on. But let me say, unlike other religions, unlike many of the other world religions who say that salvation is actually about escaping the world, Christianity, Jesus Christ comes into the world not to rescue us from the world, but to rescue us with the world.

[13 : 20] To recreate the cosmos, to establish the kingdom of God on earth. God's people in God's recreated land without disease and death and sin and disaster, that's the coming of the kingdom of God.

And that's what we're witnesses to. All right. We've got to live for the greater reality of the kingdom of God. And secondly, to the point of great cost.

To the point of great cost. Everything about missions means giving away personal freedom, personal preference, your time, your money, your gifts, and giving them to God, to God in service of God.

If you look down at verse six, it's the apostles, when they came together, they asked Jesus, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

And look, here what they're saying in that question, Lord, today is today the day that you're going to bring the kingdom to earth. And what they were asking was, are you going to establish your power and our power right now as a life of total comfort?

[14 : 33] That's what they were hoping for. And what they missed when they asked that question is the irony of mission. And we hear the irony of mission.

It comes to us from Hebrews chapter 12. And Hebrews chapter 12, it says that when Jesus Christ went to the cross, He was utterly shamed for our sin.

And yet it was for joy set before Him that He endured. And you hear the irony of mission in that, that Jesus gave Himself up completely to utter shame and death at the cross.

And in it, He had total joy in the midst of His mission. And that irony, that combination where actually the greatest joy in life is when you give yourself to great cause for something bigger than yourself.

That is exactly what the disciples, the apostles, miss when they ask the question, are you going to bring the kingdom today? Can I get straight to personal comfort and pleasure and power today?

[15 : 39] Now we don't have time to spend here to prove this, but it's become, I think, watching the allure of celebrity across the 20th and 21st century in the modern West.

It's become a common sense notion that comfort, we know this, we see it, comfort does not equal joy in life.

And instead, what actually equals joy in life, real joy in life comes with great expense for mission, giving ourselves to something greater than ourselves.

Mission costs everything and it breeds joy simultaneously. And that means if you want a life that is fully alive, be about the mission of God.

Spend yourself and put away your personal preferences and live life for the mission of God and you will know great joy. We have to live for the kingdom of God a greater reality to the point of great cost, third how, by bearing testimony to Jesus Christ.

[16 : 44] Now that's really what the heart of witness means, bearing testimony to Jesus Christ. There's a couple of things here. One, the word to witness is actually a judicial term in Greek that refers to witnessing in the courtroom, making verbal public witness in a judicial setting.

And that tells us something very simple and what it tells us is that there is no witnessing to Jesus Christ apart from words, that we have to speak words in order to witness.

What Jesus means here when he says, you are my witnesses, is he's saying you are to carry the word of the gospel, the message of the cross, the death resurrection of Jesus Christ force in into the world and that there is no accomplished witness without speaking words.

Now last week, Derek looked at Acts chapter 20, which is a parallel passage to Acts 1 where we're given an account of what ministry looks like, of what mission looks like.

And Paul says something very similar in that passage that Derek mentioned. He says that the Ephesian elders were to carry on the testimony that Paul had shared with them, the testimony of Jesus.

[18 : 01] And what he means by that, bearing the testimony of Jesus in word, in speech, is telling the story of God's work through the story of Jesus and how it's impacted your own personal life.

Now it's super important to say that because testimony in the Bible most often does not refer to teaching about Christian doctrines.

And you see that actually if you look at Paul's letters, when you open Paul's letters and he's writing to the church, he's writing to pastors, he's writing to church leaders, he talks about the theological complexity of what happened to us when we believe the gospel.

He talks to us about justification and sanctification and glorification and the relationship between baptism and the Lord's supper and all sorts of doctrines. But when you look up in the book of Acts and you see Paul going city to city and church planting, he doesn't do any of that.

When he goes to the center of the city to talk about the gospel, he doesn't say the word justification, sanctification, glorification, election, predestination. He doesn't do that.

[19 : 12] But he tells the story of the world and the light of the story of Jesus Christ and what it meant for his life.

And that's what it means to bear the testimony and word, to be able to tell the story of your own life in light of the story of Jesus, of what Jesus has done. Now that's not all, however, about witness.

There's one more thing and that's that when you look across the book of Acts to witness is always accompanied. Words are always accompanied with deeds.

It's very rare to look across the Bible and see the ministry of witness where word and deeds, acts of love, love are separated from one another. And instead what we see across the New Testament is that they go hand in hand.

You can never have witness without word, but witness is always accompanied by acts of love. The manner of life is absolutely critical to the ministry of witness.

[20 : 14] And Jesus in Matthew chapter five, when he's preaching the Sermon on the Mount, he says, my hope for you is that by the way you love people, that the world would see your good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven.

We're told that deed is absolutely intertwined with word. Word is primary, but deed is necessary. That they're interdependent that they go together. Acts 20 again that we looked at last week.

Paul ends his explanation of what ministry is in Acts 20 by saying, by such good works, you must help the weak. And the weak in that the Greek word for weak there means sick, poor or outcast.

And so he says, Ephesians elders, when you're going, the ministry, yes, is bear the testimony of the story of Jesus, but don't forget the weak. Don't forget good works that they're absolutely necessary.

Let me tell you a story about this, a true story. In the early church in the year 360, the Roman emperor Julian wrote a letter to a priest named Arsaceus.

[21 : 26] And he was a polytheistic priest, a priest of the Roman and Greek religion. And he headed up one of the large temples in the Macedonia area where lots of these churches have been planted.

And he writes this letter because he's upset the emperor that Christianity has displaced the Greek and Roman religion entirely in the region.

And this is what he says about it. Listen to this. He says this to his chief priest. What we are doing to reestablish our religion is not sufficient.

Why do we think that it is sufficient? And we have not yet observed how the kindness of the Christians to strangers, their care in the burial of the dead, and the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance the cause of their mission.

Each of these things should have been practiced by us. If anyone of the priest is not acting like this, dismiss them or persuade them to.

[22 : 29] Tell the priest to stop drinking so much. I'm devising a plan. Build hostels for the strangers in every city and be kind to the immigrants like the Christians do.

I'm ordering a fifth of our food supply to be given to the poor. It is disgraceful when no Jew is a beggar and the pious Christians not only care for their poor, but they do all the work caring for our poor.

Everyone can see that they are doing it for us. The classical mission in the church has always been the Greek word is logos, ethos, pathos, meaning logos, the word of the gospel, ethos with character, with good works, and pathos with great zeal.

And that comes together to make mission. Now we've got to be for the kingdom of God to the point of great cost in word and deed ministry and lastly as an instrument of the Holy Spirit.

And I just want to say something very brief about this. Jesus says here, Luke says here in verse one. I, in the first book, dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

[23 : 45] He's talking about the gospel of Luke there. And some people have said that the book of Acts needs to be renamed the Acts of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through the work of his witnesses.

Because in the book of Luke, it's all that Jesus began to do and the book of Acts, it's what Jesus continues to do by the Holy Spirit through his witnesses. He says in verse five and six, it's not time for the kingdom to come instead.

You're about to be baptized by the spirit. And it's just simply to note this. All of us recall, if you're a Christian today, you are called to be a witness, to take the gospel forth, to make disciples, to go into the city, and you do it with the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Meaning you have ministry power. Jesus Christ at the beginning of this ministry, the ministry of the church, he issued the Holy Spirit to the church, to his people, and has given every single one of us ministry authority.

You don't go just in and of yourselves. You actually hear that. You actually go into the world as a witness with ministry authority, with the power of Jesus Christ through the spirit commissioned with the presence of God himself with you as you go.

[25 : 09] And that means while the calling is huge, you've been given great power. That's not of yourself, but of the Holy Spirit. Now lastly, let's close with this.

We've seen the fact of mission and the nature of mission. Finally, the how of mission. The problem before us as a church, a church in a place like Edinburgh on the Royal Mile in 2022 is that we seek and long for revival in the midst of a post-Christian society.

The latest numbers are that 2.5% of people who live in Scotland attend a gospel preaching church at best once a month.

And that means that the majority of people across the land do not have not heard the gospel or not hearing the gospel or not walking through the doors of a church.

And we have the challenge that only God can bring revival and yet we can be a renewing church that prays for revival, that seeks revival, that longs for revival by praying and by going out in mission and acting in great wisdom.

[26 : 21] Now let me just say something as we close about the problem. The problem is this, that we are in a post-Christian society, not a Christendom culture. And what's the difference?

A Christendom culture is a culture where people will come to church and so getting the word out is very easy. And a Christendom culture is one where people have shared religious ideas that they all basically agree on.

So very common in Christendom cultures, people believe God exists. Something is wrong with me. There is a sacred supernatural order that I cannot see.

And that means that you can have in a Christendom culture an attraction mission model in a church setting. Meaning we expect most people in the city to come through a church door at some point and at some point hear the gospel.

And so ministry has got to be all about multiplying events within the walls of the church. And that's the model in a Christendom culture, but we do not have that.

[27 : 24] Instead we live in a post-Christian culture. And it's very important to say why sociologists, why theologians call this a post-Christian culture.

And not just a non-Christian culture, but a post-Christian culture. And the reason for that is in a post-Christian culture, the culture actually wants the goods of Christianity.

It wants the goods of the kingdom of God without acknowledging the king of the kingdom. And so the goods that Christianity brought to the west like democracy and freedom and individual rights and voting and the list could go on and on.

The culture wants those goods, but doesn't want to acknowledge the king, the Christianity that brought those goods into the culture. And so one pastor puts it like this, if it is true that more and more people lack any common religious foundation and that the dominant cultural narratives are making the Christian faith more offensive, not less, then we've got to find new and compelling ways to share the gospel in this new generation.

Now let me just leave you with this. Two things, two ways to do this, two very important ways. And this is what we're going to be taking up, coming up at the engine room on Wednesday nights, the how of this.

[28 : 39] And here they are. In this new generation, relationships are everything, relationships are everything. For most of church history, sharing the gospel has actually happened through lay people, non-ordained people, talking to others about the faith through close association, friendship, colleagues, family members and neighbors.

That's been the majority method throughout all of Christian history. And today in the 21st century, people are moved much more by relationships than anything else.

People are looking for community. And so relationships are pivotal for sharing the gospel, for being on mission in this new age. Secondly, and lastly, it's very likely as well that in the midst of those relationships that gospel conversations today are going to be, have to be different than they've been in the past.

And let me just give you one quick example. In the past, it's not uncommon for a person to say something like, I don't know how there can be a God in the midst of all the evil that I see around me, the problem of evil, very classic.

But today it may be more common that people are actually asking questions about what Christianity provides for them that they can't get elsewhere, such as, can I find a meaning in life that won't be taken away from me?

[30 : 12] Is there a satisfaction in this world that isn't fleeting? Is there a freedom that isn't just based on my feelings? Is there a justice that doesn't get redefined with every single public protest?

Is there love that is something more than a market transaction where people will come and they'll go quickly from my life? And people, that means people today in the modern secular West, they lack fulfillment.

And the gospel comes and says that there is ultimate freedom in Jesus Christ. There's an identity that can't be taken away from you in Jesus Christ. There's meaning that will never leave you in Jesus Christ.

There's hope that is secured. There's life in Jesus Christ, not death. There's God himself in the coming of the gospel. You get God, you get the very thing you were made for.

He doesn't change. And that's likely the way the gospel will need to be presented in this modern secular age. Now, 2.5% attendance in gospel preaching churches throughout the land.

[31 : 17] We are called to be witnesses, and so we have an enormous task in front of us in the coming age. And all of this, none of this, I should say, is to make us feel crushed by guilt or inspired.

Because guilt and inspirational motivational talks, TED talks, have no sustaining value in our lives. The only way that we are going, that we as a church family are going to leave this place and be about the mission of witness that we've been called to, is if every single day we look up and say, I want to be a witness for Jesus Christ because I know that I am the person who has received ultimate mercy.

I know today that without the gospel, I have nothing. I know today that all I have is Jesus Christ and that He's come for me in great love. And so I'm willing and I'm ready to go out in great love.

God can't do it, and inspirational talks can't do it. It's got to be the power of the gospel itself in our day-to-day lives. We've got to be able to say, I've been shown great mercy, and so I'm ready to step forward and show great mercy.

That is the power that motivates true mission. Let's pray together. Father, we ask that you would send us from this place with hearts motivated and moved by the power of the gospel to be witnesses for the sake of the kingdom.

[32 : 52] And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.